

TEXT OF DEMOCRATIC RESPONSE TO THE PRESIDENT'S WEEKLY RADIO
ADDRESS

Hello, this is Senator Tom Carper of Delaware.

I want to talk with you for the next few minutes about the most important challenges facing America today: educating our children and preparing them to succeed in a 21st Century economy.

The role of the federal government is not to run our nation's schools. That is the job of parents, principals, and teachers in local communities. The role of the federal government is to help level the playing field, so that all children have a chance to reach their state's rigorous academic standards and go on to lead meaningful, productive lives. We play that role by funding programs like Head Start for three and four year olds who live in poverty, and through other programs that provide extra help in math and reading to kids in school. We also play that role by funding a portion of the cost of teaching kids in special education programs across America.

This year, the Congress and the Bush administration are beginning to redefine the role of the federal government in public education in America. Democrats and Republicans agree that it is important for states to set rigorous academic standards in subjects like math, science, English, and social studies. We agree that it is important to measure objectively each year student progress towards those standards. Finally, we agree that students, schools, and school districts should be held accountable for results. There should be consequences for those who do well, and for those who do not.

Where Democrats disagree with the President and most Republicans in Congress is on the level of resources that the federal government should commit to ensure that all kids have a real shot at meeting the academic standards of their states. Now, throwing money at programs that don't raise student achievement is foolish. But, by the same token, mandating reforms without providing resources to fund them will not produce results, at least not the ones we want. Sadly, the federal government does not come close today to meeting its own obligations to help ensure that all kids have a real chance to succeed.

During the recent budget debates, Democrats fought for and won increased federal funding for education by \$300 billion above inflation over the next decade. Republicans, with encouragement from the White House, later eliminated these additional investments entirely, in order to help make a large tax cut even larger. In their effort to focus so heavily on one of our nation's important priorities – cutting taxes – they've endangered another, more important one – dramatically improving student achievement. We can do better than this, and we must.

For example, the federal government currently underfunds Head Start so badly that fewer than half of the eligible three and four-year-olds living in poverty can participate in it. President Bush's budget does not solve this problem.

Currently, the federal government underfunds Title I extra learning time programs so badly that only one of three eligible children is able to participate in them. Again, President Bush's budget does little to help these children get the extra help they need.

And currently, the federal government meets just one-third of its obligation to fund 40 percent of the cost of special education programs in schools across America. One third! We leave the rest up to the states and local communities, almost as an unfounded mandate. Unfortunately, President Bush's budget continues that federal funding shortfall, even while we demand dramatic academic progress on the part of special education students.

It didn't have to be this way.

A month before taking his oath of office, then Governor Bush invited a bipartisan group of us to Austin, Texas while I was still Governor of Delaware. There, he spoke of how he would work with like-minded Democrats and Republicans to raise student achievement in America, much as he did in Texas and we had done in Delaware.

I left Austin last December believing that Democrats could work with this new President to fulfill our obligation to improve public school education, while also providing for substantial tax relief.

Unfortunately, some time between December and now, the President's clear commitment to education became clouded. In the rush to pass too large a tax cut, the President embraced a budget that abandons most real hope of closing the gaping achievement gap that exists in America.

By choosing to support this budget and its \$1.35 trillion tax cut, the president clearly undercuts his own education agenda. In choosing to make cuts of this magnitude a higher priority than investments in education, the President has missed an historic opportunity to ensure that the federal government finally does its part to improve our public schools.

Today, I respectfully call on the president to make good on the promise of that December meeting in Austin; to honor his commitment to a new federal role in public education. One that demands accountability of students and educators, on one hand, while also ensuring that the federal government provides its fair share of the resources needed to enable every child to succeed and to leave no child behind.